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Book 112









THE  
DUCHÉ LETTER  
TO  
GENERAL WASHINGTON



Rev. JACOB DUCHÉ'S LETTER  
TO  
GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON.

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Philadelphia, Oct<sup>r</sup>. 8th, 1777.

Sir,

If this Letter should find you in council or in the field, before you read another Sentence, I beg you to take the first opportunity of retiring—and weighing its important Contents. You are perfectly acquainted with the part I formerly took in the present unhappy Contest.—I was, indeed, among the first to bear my public Testimony against having any recourse to threats, or indulging a thought of an armed Opposition. The Current however was too strong for my feeble efforts to resist. I wished to follow my Countrymen as far only as virtue and the Righteousness of their Cause would permit me. I was however prevailed upon, among the rest of my Clerical Brethren in this City, to gratify the pressing desires of my fellow-citizens—by preaching a Sermon to the 2d City Battalion. I was pressed to publish this Sermon and reluctantly consented. From a personal Attachment of near 20 years standing, and a high respect for your Character in private as well as publick life, I took the liberty of dedicating this Sermon to you.—I had your affectionate thanks for my performance in a Letter—[where] in was expressed, in the most delicate & obliging terms—your regard for me and your wishes for a Continuance of my friendship and approbation of your Conduct.

Farther than this I intended not to proceed. My Sermon speaks for itself and wholly disclaims the Idea of Independency. My Sentiments were well known to my friends:—I communicated them without reserve to many respectable Members of Congress who expressed their warm approbation of them. I persisted to the very last moment to use the prayers for my Sovereign—tho'

the Church, and omitted from the Conference Report, the Resolution of Independency. I endeavored to have it put to the Question to them "What would be the best mode of peace and quieture of the Congregation in respect of their right to continue the Service without being the Chaplain to the Royal Family?" This was the sad alternative. I concluded to accept their decision as I could not have time to consult my Superiors in England. They determined it most expedient under such critical circumstances to re-open the Church, so that the Congregation might not be dispersed - which we had a great reason to apprehend. A very few days after the fatal Declaration of Independence I received a Letter from Mr. Hanover sent by Express to Germantown - where my family [were] for the Summer season - acquainting me I was appointed Chaplain to the Congress, and desired my Attendance next Morning at 9 o'clock. Surprised and distressed as I was by an event I was not prepared to expect. Obliged to give an immediate Attendance, without the opportunity of consulting my Friends, I easily accepted the Appointment. I could have but one Motive for taking this Step. I thought the Churches in danger, and hoped by this means to have some influence in preventing thoseills I had so much reason to apprehend. I can, however, with truth declare, that I then looked upon Independency rather as an Experiment and hazardous, or indeed, thrown out in Israrm, in order to procure some favorable terms - than a Measure that was seriously persisted in at all Events. My sudden change of Conduct will clearly evince this to have been my Idea of the matter. Upon the Return of the Committee of Congress appointed to confer with Lord Howe, I soon discerned their whole Intentions. The different accounts which each member gave of this Conference - the time they took to make up the matter for publication, and the unanimous Disagreement between the News Paper account and the Relation myself had from the Mouth of one of the Committee - convinced me that there must have been some secret in it, being, neither Procedure, nor determination, to treat on no other strain than that of Independency (which put it out of his Bishop's power to remonstrate my Terms at all) was a sufficient Proof to me that Independency was the Idol they had long worshipped, and that either than sacrifice this, they would not part with it, Country and Blood. From this moment I determined upon my resignation, and in the beginning of October 1770 sent it in terms to Mr. Hanover, after

having officiated only two months and three weeks, and from that time, as far as my safety would permit, I have been opposed to all their Measures. This circumstantial Account of my Conduct I think due to the Friendship you were so obliging as to express for me, and, I hope, will be sufficient to justify my seeming inconsistencies in the part I have acted. And now, Dear Sir, suffer me, in the language of Truth and real affection, to address myself to you! All the world must be convinced you are engaged in the Service of your Country--from Motives perfectly disinterested. You risked every thing that was dear to you abandoned the Sweets of domestic life which your affluent fortune can give the uninterrupted enjoyment of--But had you, could you have had the least Idea of matters being carried to such a dangerous extremity--Your most intimate Friends shuddered at the thought of a separation from the Mother Country, and I took it for granted that your Sentiments coincided with theirs; what then can be the consequence of this rash and violent measure, and degeneracy of representation? Confusion of Councils blunders without number! The most respectable characters have withdrawn themselves and are succeeded by a great Majority of illiberal and violent men. Take an impartial view of the present Congress--and what can you expect from them? Your feelings must be greatly hurt by the representation of your natural Province. You have no longer a Randolph, a Bland, or a Braxton--Men whose names will ever be revered--whose demands never ran above the first ground on which they set out, and whose truly glorious and virtuous sentiments I have frequently heard with rapture from their own lips! O, my dear Sir! What a sad Contrast of Characters now present! Others whose friends can never mingle with your own. Your Garrison alone remains, and he disgusted with the unworthy Associates. As to those of my own Province--some of them are so obscure that their very names were never in my ears before, and others have only been distinguished for the weakness of their Understandings, and the violence of their tempers. One alone I except from the general charge,--a man of virtue drawn reluctantly, and restrained, by some false ideas of honor, from retreating, after having gone too far. You cannot be at loss to discover whose name answers to this Character.

From the N. England provinces can you find one, that as a Gentleman you could wish to associate with, unless the soft and mild Address of Mr. Hancock, can atone for his want of every

other qualification necessary for the seat which he holds. But simple Attorneys and Men of desperate fortunes, or the Cuckolds of Maryland no longer sends a Pilgrim and a protestant Caro. Carolina has lost its Lynch, and the elder Melderton is retired. Are the dregs of Congress then still to influence a mind like yours? These are not the men you engaged to serve—these are not the Men America has chosen to represent her. Most of them were chosen by a little low faction, and the few Gentlemen that are among them now—are well known to be on the balance, and I do not give up to your hand alone to turn the beam. Yes you, Sir, and you only, that support the present Congress, of this year must be fully sensible. Long before they left Philadelphia their dignity and Consequence was gone;—what must it be now since their precipitate retreat? I write with freedom, but without impudence—I know these things to be true, and I write to one whose own Observations must have convinced him it is so. After this view of the Congress, turn to the Army; the whole world knows that its only existence depends upon you, that your death or Captivity disperses it in a moment; and that there is not a Man in that side the Question in America capable of succeeding you. As to the Army itself, what have you to expect from them? Have they not frequently abandoned you yourself in the hour of extremity? Can you, have you the least Confidence in a set of undisciplined men and officers, many of them have been taken from the lowest of the people, without principle, without Courage—take away them who surround your person, how very few are there you can ask to sit at your Table? As to your little navy, of that little, what is left? Of the Delaware fleet part are taken, the rest must soon surrender; of those in the other provinces, some are taken, one or two at sea, and others lying unmanned and unrigged in your harbours; and now where are your Resources? Oh! my dear Sir, how sadly have you been abused by a faction void of truth, and void of tenderness to you and your Country? They have anni'd your wife's hopes of a declaration of war on the part of France; Believe me, from the best Authority, it was a fiction from the first. Early in the year 1770 a French Gentleman was introduced to me, with whom I became intimately acquainted. His business to all appearance—was to speculate in the mercantile way, but I believe it will be found, that in his Country he moved in a higher sphere. He saw your Cause, & became acquainted with all your military preparations; he was

introduced to Congress, and engaged with them in a commercial Contract. In the course of our intimacy—he has frequently told me—that he hoped the Americans would never think of Independency; he gave me his reasons: “Independency can never be supported unless France should declare War against England. I well know the state of her Finances—years to come will not put them in a Situation to enter upon a breach with England. At this moment there are two parties in the Court of Versailles; one enlisted under the Duke de Choiseul, the other under Count Maurepas. Choiseul has no chance of succeeding, tho' he is violent for war; Maurepas must get the better,—he is for economy and peace.” This was his information, which I mentioned to several Members of Congress; they treated it as a Fable—depending entirely on Doctor Franklin’s intelligence. The truth of the matter is this, Doctor Franklin built upon the success of Choiseul: upon his Arrival in France, he found him out of place, his Councils reprobated, and his party dwindled into an insignificant faction: This you may depend upon to be the true state of Affairs in France or the Court of Doctor Franklin. And further by vast numbers of Letters found on board prizes taken by the King’s Ships, it appears, that all commerce with the Merchants, thro’ whom all your supplies have been conveyed, will be at an end; the letters being full of complaints of no remittances from America, and many individuals having generally suffered. From your Friends in England you have nothing to expect, their numbers have diminished to a Cypher; the spirit of the whole nation is in activity, a few sounding names among the Nobility, tho’ perpetually rung in your ears, are without character, without influence. Disappointed ambition has made them desperate, and they only wish to make the deluded Americans instruments of revenge. All orders and ranks of men in Great Britain are now unanimous, and determined to risque their all with Content. Trade and Manufactures are found to flourish, and new Channels are continually offering—that will perhaps more than supply the loss of the old. In America your harbours are blocked up, your cities fall one after another; fortress after fortress, battle after battle is lost. A British Army after having passed unmolested thro’ a vast Extent of Country, have possessed themselves of the Capital of America. How unequal the Contest? How fruitless the expence of blood? Under so many discouraging Circumstances—can virtue, can honor, can the love of your Country—prompt you to proceed?

Humanity & Mankind humanity in no tract of the world, can compare with that of America. She has a right to be independent, and she has the means of supporting her independence, and she has the means of supporting them. When such a power is possessed, surely it is the impious who dare to call it a curse. But I fear Britain will pursue, and may accomplish, the destruction which America herself has begun. But that may be hard to offer to do than to be made. Success is indeed the parent of all sin in Theory, and perhaps in some instances may be found experimentally true, but often there is a last probability of accommodation, fully warranting it, many a effort must suffice to be made, to prevent inevitable destruction. You well know there is but one unimpassioned way to such accommodations, could this be removed, other bases might readily be removed.

It is to you and your allies your bleeding Country looks and calls aloud for this sacrifice upon Arm alone has strength sufficient to remove this bar.—May heaven inspire you with this glorious resolution of exerting your strength at this Crisis, and immortalizing yourself as friend and guardian to your Country; your penetrating eye needs not more exorbitant language to discern my meaning, with that precision and felicity thereto, of which I know you possessful, to me or some to Congress, the indispensable necessity of revoking the hasty and ill-advised declaration of Independence. Recommend my old friend and tried right to recommend, an immediate cessation of hostilities. Let the Controversy be taken up by such a trial committee as left it, and where Lord Howe certainly expected to find it fit. Let men of clear and impartial Characters, in or out of Congress, be sent in their instruments, for total independence from Great Britain, and some such may be found in America to account for his conference with His Majesty's Commissioners. Let them, with proper assistance, prepare some well digested constitutional plan to follow them at the commencement of the Negotiations, when they have gone. This far, I am confident the world approves me, and I trust a majority will—

On taking up the trial committee, the world's who are now evidently wishing at a peaceful separation, a measure will step forth and decide the issue of the Crisis. Why, it is the Constitutional Faculty and Major General Washington, who left the field of War to take both sides of the question, Content with the weapons of reason and truth, & the God of Justice, to see a good world's honor established, and a just peace secured, whatever

ensures may be thrown out by mean illiberal minds, your character will rise in the estimation of the virtuous and noble, it will appear with lustre in the Annals of History, and form a glorious contrast to that of those—who have fought to obtain conquest, and gratify their own ambition by the destruction of their species and the ruin of their country. Be assured, Sir, that I write not this under the eye of any British Officer, or any person connected with the British Army or Ministry. The sentiments I express are the real sentiments of my own heart, such as I have long held, and which I should have made known to you by Letter before, had [H] not fully expected an opportunity of a personal conference with you. When you passed thro' Philadelphia on your way to Wilmington, I was confined by a severe fit of the Gravel, to my chamber: I have since continued so much indisposed, & times have been so distressing, that I had neither spirit to write a letter, nor an opportunity to convey it when written, nor do I yet know by what means I shall get these sheets to your hands; I would fain hope that I have said nothing by which your delicacy can be in the least hurt; if I have, I assure you, it has been without the least intention, and therefore your Candor will lead you to forgive me. I have spoke freely of Congress and the Army, but what I have said is partly from my own knowledge, and partly from the information of some respectable members of the former, and some of the best Officers in the latter; I would not offend the meanest person upon earth; what I say to you, I say in confidence to answer what I cannot but deem a most valuable purpose. I love my Country, I love you; but to the love of truth—the love of peace and the love of God, I hope I should be enabled, if called upon to the trial, to sacrifice every other inferior love. If the arguments made use of in this Letter should have so much influence, as to engage you in the glorious work, which I have warmly recommended, I shall ever deem my success the highest temporal favor that Providence could grant me. Your interposition and advice, I am confident, would meet with a favorable reception from the authority under which you act; if it should not, you have an infallible recourse still left—negotiate for your Country at the head of your Army. After all it may appear presumption as an individual to address himself to you on a subject of such magnitude, or to say what measures would best secure the interest & welfare of a whole Continent. Their really an favorable opinion you have always expressed for me emboldens me to under-

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which you which have greatly added to the weight of the motive  
I have before strongly impelled with a sense of duty upon the  
course which left my conscience uneasy and my heart afflicted  
till I had the hang of it. I am no enthusiast—the cause is new  
and singular to me, but I could not enjoy one moment's peace  
till this Letter was written. With the most ardent prayers for  
your spiritual as well as temporal welfare—I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient and  
humble Friend and Servant

JACOB DUCHE.

His Excellency General Washington.























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